

Writing a Great Research Paper: **How to Be Persuasive** *Study Guide*

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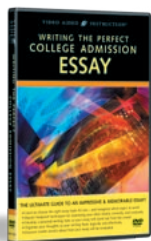
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Writing a Great Research Paper: How to Be Persuasive Study Guide

Introduction

Most research paper assignments require students to articulate a thesis and make a persuasive case in its defense. This exceptional program will teach you to develop logical arguments, support them with evidence, deal with opposing points of view, and avoid logical fallacies and other errors. Plus, you'll learn other proven ways to make your writing more convincing and powerful!

For easier studying and maximum success, we recommend that you view the program over a number of short sessions: don't try to absorb too much at one time. Review the entire program, or specific sections, as many times as you find necessary in order to master the material.

Perhaps most importantly: Don't forget to take advantage of your "pause" button while viewing the program. Keep plenty of scrap paper handy so you can jot down ideas, work through concepts, and more. And finally, be sure to use the myriad on-screen graphics to take notes for yourself—when you're done, you'll have a notebook you can refer back to again and again.

About Your Instructor

Karl Weber, M.A., is an educator, editor, and bestselling author in fields ranging from business to politics to test preparation. He has worked on books with such noted figures as management guru Adrian Slywotzky, Loews Hotels CEO Jonathan M. Tisch, and President Jimmy Carter.

Part 1: Developing a Thesis

The final thesis for your research paper is your answer to the central question you are investigating. It may be the same as your working thesis, or it might be quite different. If your research showed that your original thesis was quite incorrect, your final thesis could end up stating almost the opposite of the working thesis. More often, your thesis will be a modification of the working thesis—that is, a version of that original thesis that has been modified, deepened, clarified, and enhanced by all the new facts and ideas you’ve learned through your research.

A good final thesis:

- must be supported by your research (in that it articulates an idea, opinion, interpretation, or theory that is backed up by the evidence your reading has uncovered);
- is a positive, non-obvious statement (that is, not a truism);
- must not be a tautology (a statement that must be true or cannot be disproved because it includes an unnecessary and excessive repetition of the same idea in different words); and
- must be worth arguing, and, preferably, original and interesting.

Write your final thesis here, stated in a single clear sentence:

Part 2: Supporting Your Thesis with Evidence

Go through your notes and pick out the facts and ideas that are most relevant to your thesis. Look for items that:

- help to explain the thesis;
- help to show that it’s true;
- may call it into question or weaken it; or
- sharpen, focus, clarify, or modify it.

Some of the kinds of evidence most commonly utilized in research papers are:

- Definitions of terms
- Accounts of events that suggest a cause-and-effect relationship
- Statistics or other numerical data
- Individual examples that suggest a broader pattern (e.g., anecdotes)
- Facts or ideas from primary sources
- Facts or ideas from secondary sources
- Evidence related to alternative theses (especially evidence that seems to weaken them)

As you review your notes, be on the lookout for any examples of these kinds of evidence!

Part 3: Avoiding Logical Fallacies

Some of the types of logical fallacies that you should avoid are:

- Unclear use of terms (defining the same term differently across different arguments)
- *Post hoc ergo propter hoc* (Latin for “after this, therefore because of this”—assuming that, when *A* occurs before *B*, *A* must have caused *B*)
- Hasty generalization (basing a conclusion on a small or flimsy body of evidence)
- “Straw man” (suggesting a weak, flimsy, and inaccurate summary of an alternative thesis in order to argue against it)
- Appeal to authority (trying to persuade your reader to accept an idea just because someone famous or respected said it)
- *Ad hominem* (Latin for “against the person”—criticizing an opposing point of view, not by showing why it is logically incorrect or factually wrong, but by attacking the person who stated it)

Part 4: Elements of Persuasive Style

Over the years, writers have developed stylistic and organizational tricks that give their writing a tone that is reasonable, thoughtful, and balanced. Some of the best of these are:

- Be forceful and direct.
- Respond to key counterarguments.
- Make concessions when necessary.
- Don’t overstate your case.
- Put your strongest arguments first and last.

Also, remember to guide your readers through your arguments! Consider using constructions like:

- “As a result of *X*, *Y*” or “Because *X*, *Y*”
- “*Y*, as a result of *X*” or “*Y*, because *X*”
- “In spite of *X*, *Y*” or “Despite *X*, *Y*”
- “Although *X*, *Y*” or “*X*, nevertheless *Y*”

In your research paper, you present your own ideas that connect the facts and concepts you’ve discovered through your research. Make sure your readers can follow you!